

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 150

EC 302 911

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TITLE Social Conditions of Hearing-Impaired Pupils in
Regular Classes. Reprints and Miniprints No. 773.
INSTITUTION Lund Univ. (Sweden). Malmo School of Education.
REPORT NO ISSN-1100-3391
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Classroom Environment; Elementary
Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Friendship;
*Hearing Impairments; Life Satisfaction;
*Mainstreaming; *Peer Relationship; Social
Adjustment; Social Integration; *Social Life;
Sociometric Techniques
IDENTIFIERS Sweden

ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes a Swedish thesis describing the social situation of hearing-impaired pupils (n=215) integrated in regular classes. Pupils with hearing impairments in grades 1-11 in two counties in Sweden were interviewed, questionnaires were completed by parents and teachers, sociometric studies were carried out, and observations were made. Results indicated that hearing-impaired pupils were less satisfied with their social situation and had fewer friends than their hearing classmates--particularly among teenagers. Younger pupils, pupils not using hearing aids, and pupils with better functional hearing had a more favorable social situation. The thesis concluded that many different circumstances influence the social situation of a pupil with a hearing impairment, including attitudes, behaviors, and personalities of staff and schoolmates; circumstances in the physical environment; and characteristics of the hearing-impaired pupils themselves, such as functional hearing capacity, additional handicaps, personality, and age. (Contains 15 references.) (JDD)

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Department of Educational and Psychological Research
Malmö School of Education - University of Lund

No. 773

SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF HEARING-IMPAIRED PUPILS IN REGULAR CLASSES

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SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF HEARING-IMPAIRED PUPILS IN REGULAR CLASSES

Anna-Lena Tvingstedt

Tvingstedt, A.-L. Social conditions of hearing-impaired pupils in regular classes. *Reprints and Miniprints* (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 773, 1993.

The present report is a summary of a Swedish thesis with the purpose of describing the social situation of hearing-impaired pupils integrated in regular classes.

The study comprised all hearing-impaired pupils in grades 1-11 in the regular school system of the two southernmost counties in Sweden. Data were collected through interviews with the pupils and by questionnaires to their parents and teachers. Sociometric studies were carried out and in a number of classes video recordings and observations were made.

The results showed that hearing-impaired pupils in regular classes were less satisfied with their social situation and had fewer friends than their hearing classmates – particularly among the teenagers. Younger pupils, pupils not using hearing aids and pupils with better functional hearing had a more favourable social situation. In the video recordings a number of significant factors could be identified – in the classroom situation and in the interaction between hearing-impaired pupils, teachers and peers – that were of importance in the formation of social relations.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, elementary education, hearing-impaired, mainstreaming, peer relations, secondary education, social integration, special education.

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Background

An endeavour to provide education for *all* pupils within the framework of the regular school system has characterized school policies in Sweden during the last few decades. The rationale behind the placement of children with disabilities in regular schools has been disenchantment with segregated placements. The segregation of groups of children to special schools or classes has been considered to have discriminatory effects and has been seen as a barrier to relations between "ordinary" and "special" children.

One principal argument in favour of the placement of "special" children in the mainstream has been that the primary condition for the establishment of social relationships is opportunities of getting into contact. But increased opportunities for contact do not automatically bring about favourable social relationships. Friendship is based on mutuality - the sharing of activities, interests and thoughts. Conversations make up a large part of social dealings, and general communication skills are crucial in interpersonal relations.

A hearing impairment is generally characterized as a communication handicap which, in turn, implies a social handicap. The concept 'hearing impairment' is, however, applied to categories of people with different kinds and degrees of communication difficulties, encompassing persons with a very mild hearing loss as well as the profoundly deaf. A distinction has to be made between the hard of hearing - i. e. persons who have been able to acquire language and speech through hearing - and the pre-lingually deaf, who have to rely on vision and are dependent on a visual/gestural code. No one today advocates regular mainstreaming of pre-lingually deaf children in Sweden. Their right to sign-language communication is no longer questioned, and within their own group they have no communication problems, only among hearing people. Pre-lingually deaf children go to Schools for the Deaf. They constitute 27 per cent of the school population with impaired hearing in Sweden. The remaining 73 per cent obtain their education within the regular school system.

A hard-of-hearing person may be able to cope well in a conversation with one or two people at a time, depending on lip-reading skill and ability to utilize hearing residuals, but will usually be substantially handicapped in a larger group. Inability to follow conversation in a larger group is usually referred to as "social deafness" and can affect persons with just a slight hearing loss. Hard-of-hearing pupils in regular schools find themselves in a situation that causes "social deafness". Are they able to join in the companionship of their hearing peers?

Purpose and method

There has only been limited information concerning the experiences of hearing-impaired pupils in regular schools. An investigation was therefore initiated by the former National Swedish Board of Education in order to look into the educational and social conditions of the hard of hearing in their school setting.

The aim of the investigation was to study by what means the needs of hearing-impaired pupils had been met: improvement of acoustics, technical equipment, supplemental assistance, adaptation of teaching procedures etc. It was also the intention of the study to describe the school situation as experienced mainly by the pupils, but also by parents and teachers. The final major purpose of the investigation was to study the social conditions and peer relations of hearing-impaired pupils in regular schools.

The investigation was made in the regular school system of the two southernmost counties of Sweden - an area with a population of about one million - and it was carried out in the following steps:

1. Pilot study to gather data for the construction of questionnaires. Interviews with 20 hard-of-hearing pupils of different ages, their parents, teachers and principals.
2. Main study with collection of data through questionnaires to all parents, teachers and principals of hard-of-hearing students. Visits to schools and interviews with all hearing-impaired pupils.
3. Sociometric study in classes where a hard-of-hearing pupil was placed. "
4. Video recordings and observations in a number of classes.
5. Experiments with hearing-aid use among hearing classmates in a number of classes.
6. Experiment with simulated hearing loss in a group of teachers.
7. A follow-up study of hearing-impaired individuals of school age who had discontinued their schooling.

The chief results of the investigation have been reported in Swedish (Nordén et al, 1990) and, partially, in a number of articles in English (Nordén et al, 1981, 1985; Tvingstedt, 1985, 1986, 1989) and in German (Nordén et al, 1985; Tvingstedt, 1986, 1989, 1991).

The present study has been carried out within the framework of the above-mentioned investigation. It is an account of those parts of the investigation that pertained to the social situation and peer relations of hearing-impaired pupils.

The main purpose of this study was to describe the social conditions of hearing-impaired pupils in regular classes.

The following more specific questions were put forward:

1. How do the hearing-impaired pupils themselves experience their peer relations at school and at home?
2. How do parents and teachers of hearing-impaired pupils describe the pupils' peer relations, and how do these descriptions compare with the experiences of the pupils concerned?
3. Do hard-of-hearing pupils in regular classes have friends to the same extent as their hearing classmates?
4. Does the social situation of hearing-impaired pupils in regular classes differ from that of hearing-impaired pupils in special placements?
5. Does the social situation differ among subgroups of hearing-impaired pupils, e. g. pupils of different ages or pupils with different degrees of hearing loss?
6. Is it possible to identify significant events in the classroom, or in the interaction between hearing-impaired pupils, teachers and classmates, that are of importance in the formation of social relations?

The results of the present study are derived from data collected during steps two, three and four of the main investigation. This report deals with those questions in the interviews with pupils, and in the questionnaires to their parents and teachers, that concern the social situation and peer relations of hearing-impaired pupils. The sociometric study is accounted for and supplemented by a sociometric study in a School for the Deaf, in order to widen the frame of reference and to obtain further comparison groups. The quantitative results from these studies are then elucidated by the information obtained from video recordings and from observations in classrooms.

Several different methods have been used to investigate the same problem area, a procedure generally referred to as triangulation. The different methods shed light upon different aspects of the problem, and together they may produce a more complete picture of the relevant phenomena.

Subjects

Pupils supplied with hearing aids by audiological specialists were regarded as hearing-impaired. The study comprised all hearing-impaired pupils who were born between 1961 and 1971 and placed in grades 1 through 11 in the regular school system in the area - totalling 215 pupils, 135 boys and 80 girls. This approximates the proportions of 60 per cent boys and 40 per cent girls generally found among children with hearing impairment. The hard-of-hearing subjects amounted to 0.15 per cent of the school population in the area. The majority, 157 pupils, were placed in regular classes. Most of them were in the position of being the only hard-of-hearing subject in the class. About a fourth, 58 pupils, went to small special classes for the hard of hearing. These proportions correspond closely to the figures for Sweden at large (Hammarstedt & Amcoff, 1979).

Of the 13 special classes in the study, eight groups were self-contained, few activities being shared with hearing pupils. In the remaining five groups, coordinated teaching was the ordinary procedure, i. e. the hard-of-hearing pupils joined a hearing class for all or most subjects.

The pupils' average hearing loss as measured by pure tone audiometry ranged from less than 25 decibels to close to 100 dB in the better ear. Of the pupils placed in regular classes, only 13 per cent had an average hearing loss that was greater than 60 dB in the better ear. For the majority, 60 per cent, the hearing loss was between 30-50 dB. In the special classes, 52 per cent of the pupils had a hearing loss of over 60 dB. A hearing threshold of 25 dB or less is usually considered as normal hearing. Most of the pupils with sound reactions within this boundary had a greater loss in the other ear. Few of them used hearing aids.

Hearing aids had been prescribed to all the pupils; but at the time of the study, 45 of them had given up using their aids. Nearly all were teenagers, and none had a hearing loss beyond 60 dB. All of them went to regular classes, and they represented a fourth of the hard-of-hearing pupils placed in regular classes.

A larger proportion of boys was placed in regular classes. This applied in particular to boys with a hearing loss greater than 60 dB - despite the fact that the degree of hearing loss was equally distributed among girls and boys. The general pattern of more boys than girls in special classes was thus confirmed.

According to the teachers' reports, 19 per cent of the hearing-impaired pupils had some additional physical handicap, compared to 2 per cent among their normally-hearing classmates in the regular classes. The incidence of other special problems, mainly learning difficulties and psychosocial problems, were 22 per cent among the hearing-impaired and 4 per cent among the normally-

hearing pupils. In the special classes, the proportion of pupils with additional difficulties - handicaps or special problems - was substantially greater than in the regular classes.

In the questionnaires, teachers in regular classes supplied assessments of the verbal ability of the hard of hearing compared to their hearing classmates. The assessments were made with reference to speech, writing, reading and vocabulary. According to the teachers, the pupils' reading and writing were better than their speech and vocabulary. More than 60 per cent of the pupils performed at the average level with respect to reading and writing, compared to 52-54 per cent with respect to vocabulary and speech. Older pupils and pupils with less severe hearing impairments were generally assessed as performing better.

In the interviews with hearing-impaired pupils, an estimate of their ability to take part in an oral dialogue was made. According to the interviewer, 64 per cent of the pupils whose hearing loss was ≤ 60 dB were able to take part in a conversation between two persons in quiet surroundings without noticeable difficulties in comprehending speech or expressing themselves, compared to only 13 per cent of the pupils with more severe hearing losses.

In the course of the interviews, the pupils reported whether they found it easy or difficult to register the utterances of teachers and classmates. The use of teacher microphones with radio-transmitted signals by wire loops and FM receivers made it possible for 65 per cent of the pupils in regular classes to hear the teacher but such arrangements also made it difficult to hear what the other pupils said. Only 3 per cent of the hard of hearing could hear their classmates well and 30 per cent always found it difficult. The remainder found it difficult at times. In classes where no teacher microphone was used, fewer of the hearing-aid users could hear their teachers well. At the same time, more of them could hear classmates better.

When the hearing aid is set to its own environmental microphone - or to the teacher microphone as well as the environmental one - not only speech will be amplified but disturbing noise, too. To many pupils, this implies a choice between two equally unpleasant alternatives - not being able to hear even classmates sitting close by, or having to endure the disturbing noise.

Pupils who were not using their hearing aids could hear the teacher to the same extent as hearing-aid users in classes where no teacher microphone was used; but they found it considerably easier to hear the utterances of classmates - the comparison being made between pupils with the same degree of hearing loss.

The social situation

Social interaction differs with age. "Small talk" and conversations do not play the same role in the lives of children as among teenagers and adults. Children are generally engaged in games and overt activities - they interact by "doing" things together, and a hearing impairment does not necessarily impede mutual understanding. Besides, children are likely to be less self-conscious, and they take part in peer group activities without questioning. Among younger children, a hearing impairment therefore does not have to entail limitations in companionship and mutual understanding.

In the social lives of teenagers, on the other hand, the exchange of thoughts and opinions plays a major role. At the adolescent stage, when reflection and the sharing of thoughts and feelings take up much of the time, the ability to take part in conversations and discussions can be decisive in forming and maintaining social contacts. A hearing impairment usually implies more severe limitations in the social relations of older pupils than in those of younger ones.

This was confirmed by the information obtained in the interviews and questionnaires as well as in the sociometric study.

Many of the older hearing-impaired pupils in regular classes felt themselves to be outsiders. Their own reports about peer relations and the results from the sociometric study showed that several of them, primarily among the hearing-aid users in grades 7-11, hardly had any friends. Among hearing-aid users, the younger pupils (grades 1-6) in regular classes told of more fortunate companionship experiences - 70 per cent of the younger pupils were satisfied with their peer relations, as compared to 53 per cent of the older ones. In the sociometric study, the younger pupils also received a considerably larger number of friendship choices than the older ones. These differences may largely be a function of developmental changes. Since verbal conversations play a more important role in the interactions of teenagers, the behavioural basis for peer acceptance ought to be different at different ages. But the differences between younger and older pupils were probably also augmented by the altered school organization at the intermediate and secondary-school level. From grade 7 onwards, classes mostly had no home rooms. Pupils moved between different rooms for separate subjects and had many different teachers. The constant switch of classrooms made the use of technical amplification systems more difficult. Moreover, at this stage, the hearing-impaired pupils were themselves responsible for the technical equipment. They had to bring along movable units and control their functioning. This interfered with social activities during breaks and often left no time for associating with peers.

One common argument in favour of regular-class placement has been to maintain contacts between hearing-impaired pupils and their neighbourhood peers. The hard-of-hearing pupils in the study were, however, generally less satisfied with their companionship situation at home than with the one that existed at school. One important aspect that has to be taken into account is that being hard of hearing can be so fatiguing that there is little scope left for peer interaction. To some of the pupils, the constant effort to concentrate and listen, and the extra homework needed to keep pace in class, left them so exhausted that they had no energy to spare for leisure activities and social contacts with peers. Opportunities for spare time activities in contexts where friendships are formed and maintained, may hence have been limited - even if potential friends might have been available.

As fatigue - often in combination with headaches - was more common among hearing-aid users, one reason for tiredness was apparently the discomfort caused by the amplification of disturbing noise. Pupils who did not use their hearing aids complained less of fatigue. They were also more satisfied with their peer relations at school as well as at home, and they received a larger number of sociometric choices.

In the special classes, the pupils' own accounts of their peer relations did not give a brighter picture than the one obtained from regular classes. This was particularly apparent in the self-contained classes. These groups were apt to be too small and too heterogenous, not offering enough social contacts. Besides, many pupils in the special classes had problems in communicating with one another. Most of them had more severe hearing losses than the pupils in regular classes, and they generally knew little or nothing of sign language. The teenagers in the special classes were even more dissatisfied with their companionship situation than the hard of hearing in regular classes - only 31 per cent of them reported that they had satisfactory peer relations at school. Since the special-class pupils did not go to the neighbourhood school, they had a limited number of friends around home as well.

The parents' accounts of their children's companionship situation adhered to the same general pattern as that of the hearing-impaired pupils themselves - at least among the younger pupils. The parents of older pupils were probably less well informed about the peer relations of their children. They often overestimated the social relations of the hard-of-hearing teenagers, revealing an unrealistically positive outlook - as did many of the teachers.

The sociometric study showed that hard-of-hearing pupils in regular classes had fewer friends than their classmates with normal hearing. The proportion of pupils who had no friendship options at all was substantially greater among the hearing-impaired than among their hearing classmates. This applied in particular to teenagers (grades 7-11) where 47 per cent of the hearing-

aid users were never selected as preferred companions, neither for classroom work nor for time off. The corresponding proportions for their hearing classmates were 8 per cent for classroom work and 11 per cent for time-off conditions. In grades 1-6, 14 per cent of the hearing-aid users received no choice for classroom work, to be set against 9 per cent of the hearing pupils. This is the only difference that is not statistically significant. In respect of time off 25 per cent of them received no choice as friend compared to 9 per cent of the hearing pupils. The proportions of hearing pupils who were never chosen tally with results from other studies (Gronlund, 1959; Hymel & Asher, 1977).

There were differences in peer relations among sub-groups of hearing-impaired pupils. Apart from age, a number of factors were related to the companionship situation. A more favourable social situation was associated with a mild to moderate hearing loss. However, subjective functional hearing, as manifested in the capacity to hear the utterances of peers and ability to take part in an oral dialogue, yielded better predictions of the pupils' social relations than audiometric measures. Accordingly, the companionship situation of the hard-of-hearing pupils who had given up using their hearing aids was more favourable. They had better functional hearing than hearing-aid users with a corresponding hearing loss.

The social situation of the deaf pupils at a School for the Deaf appeared to be more favourable than that of the hard of hearing in regular schools. By virtue of their sign language, the deaf had access to unimpeded communication among themselves. They could function on equal terms with schoolmates where they were able to form social relations and develop a cultural identity in their own group.

Classroom interaction

The exchange of messages in social interaction is not confined to the auditory channel. Meaning is largely conveyed through visually perceived behaviours - eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and so forth. Visually impaired children have problems in initiating and maintaining social contacts (Markovitz & Strayer, 1982; Palmer, 1987).

To achieve social competence, hearing-impaired children need to rely on proficiency in interpreting visual, non-verbal communicative behaviours to a much larger extent than children with normal hearing (Hummel & Schirmer, 1984). To promote the development of social skills, hearing-impaired pupils should be seated so that they can see what is going on in class and become aware of the social rules in peer interactions.

The video recordings of classroom interactions revealed several incidents where hard-of-hearing pupils in the front row tried to contact classmates sitting behind and were dismissed - often rightly so, since the contact initiatives were ill-timed. Proper timing of initiatives is of crucial importance in social interaction, and this is definitely not facilitated by a placement in the front row where classmates can neither be seen nor heard. Such a placement can deprive the hearing-impaired pupil of useful social learning opportunities and may impose a position as a neglected or rejected person in the peer group.

Seating arrangements may also have a reinforcing or abating effect on disturbing behaviour. The hard-of-hearing pupils' need for visual information may call for frequent changes in the direction of their gaze. Pupils in the front row could be seen struggling to obtain glimpses of what went on behind them and often appeared restless. Thus for example, a boy in grade three constantly turned back and forth, looking at the classmates behind him and the teacher in front of him. He gave an immediate impression of restlessness and was characterized as 'fidgety' by the teacher. However, when the video recordings were scrutinized, it became apparent that he was actually striving to keep up with the lesson - to see who was answering and what he was saying, what book to work with or which page to read. Another boy of the same age in a class sitting in a U-shaped arrangement, was calm and relaxed. He could take in what went on in class, and who was talking, by just looking up. Placement in U-form allows for shifting of gazes without comprehensive body movements. Then the hard of hearing can keep up with what is going on and will be less distracting to others.

Only 13% of the hard-of-hearing pupils in the study went to classes with U-shaped seating arrangements. Most were sitting in the front row, and apparently staff and authorities were unaware that this could have detrimental consequences - maybe in particular with regard to the social situation.

A hearing impairment not only makes it difficult to hear but - and this may well be worse - it causes misunderstandings, too. For instance, the hearing-impaired person sometimes 'hears' something else than what was actually said. To many hearing-impaired people this entails a constant uncertainty as to whether they have understood something correctly. To enable the hard-of-hearing pupil to be sure that he has taken in the 'proper' messages, complementary visual information must be provided - written directions, help from peers, opportunities to look at the speaker and so on. In the video recordings, there were examples of how a written orientation about the content of the lesson, or written directions on how to perform a task, made the work easier for the hearing-impaired pupil. Unfortunately, this occurred too infrequently. There were several examples showing how the required information was missing, and the hard-of-hearing pupil did not know what to do, or did not even have a clue as to what the lesson was about until a friend scribbled a few explanatory words on

a piece of paper. Besides, such incidents put the hard of hearing in an embarrassing situation, which may make them appear awkward in the eyes of their classmates. Since a hearing-impaired person needs to look at the speaker when listening, it is generally not possible to concentrate on written material and listen effectively at the same time. Hodgson (1984) points out that if oral comments have to be made when working with visual material, the hearing-impaired pupil should have access to individualized instruction or help from a friend. In one class where the teacher gave instructions and asked questions, at the same time requiring pupils to read in a book, the hearing-impaired pupil constantly changed the direction of his gaze back and forth between the book and the teacher's face. The effort to read and listen at the same time put him at a disadvantage, and made it more difficult to accomplish the task. In another class, by contrast, where the teacher tried to avoid making oral comments while working with written material, it could be observed how the hearing-impaired pupil was able to concentrate on the task and work under the same conditions as the classmates. The difficulty of listening effectively while working with written materials also raises problems when it comes to making notes. Teaching should be organized so that note-taking becomes superfluous, e.g. by handing out a draft of the lesson in advance and preparing a short written summary of items to be remembered.

In the video recordings, it became obvious that the hearing-impaired pupils themselves made use of a number of special strategies in order to deal with the classroom situation - to ensure that enough information was acquired, or to avoid getting into embarrassing situations. Such strategies could, for instance, consist in checking what others do before doing anything oneself, waiting to raise one's hand until someone else got the question, or - in the extreme case - passive withdrawal.

Hearing-impaired pupils frequently have to rely on help from classmates to make sure that they have understood correctly and know what is going to happen next. In the video recordings, there were many examples of how a helpful friend made it easier for the hearing-impaired classmate to follow the teaching. But if one party is always the donor and the other the constant recipient, a one-sided dependency in peer relations may be induced. Always having to depend on others, and never being made to contribute, promotes neither self-confidence nor personal maturity. Such a situation may also make for peer relations where the hearing-impaired person is assigned to, and accepts, an inferior position. For the teacher it is therefore necessary to keep an eye on interactions and maybe make deliberate attempts to bring about a balance in mutual relations. Seatings can be arranged so that the hard-of-hearing pupil has a friend close by who is able to supply help in an adequate way. But it may also be necessary to openly show confidence in the capacity of the hearing-impaired

person, giving him or her the opportunity to make use of his/her own assets in the work and interaction in class.

The teacher's ability to handle the class and to support the standing of the hearing-impaired pupil, may be of crucial importance to the pupil's position in the group. In the video recordings, there were instances when teacher behaviour was instrumental in sustaining the status of the pupil; but there were other cases where the teacher more or less undermined the pupil's position. The teacher's attitude towards the hard of hearing could so obviously affect interaction that it had a direct influence on the classmates. Through his/her own deportment, the teacher knowingly or unknowingly set a pattern of behaviour towards the hearing-impaired person which served as a model to the other pupils.

The teacher's capacity for empathy turned out to be an important factor. There were good examples of teachers who, through observations and discussions with a hard-of-hearing pupil, tried to put themselves in that pupil's position and adapt the teaching as well as their own behaviour to the faculties and needs of the pupil. This behaviour encompassed not only respect for the pupil's personal integrity and confidence in his capacity, but also a flexible attitude which occasionally allowed the hearing-impaired pupil to be different in order to be able to develop normally.

Conclusions

In some cases the school placement worked well both educationally and socially, particularly among the younger pupils; but to many of the hearing-impaired pupils conditions were far from satisfactory, and a number of them - mostly at the higher school levels (grades 7-11) - had an unreasonably trying school situation, not leaving much room for contacts with peers.

One common cause of unsatisfactory conditions appears to be the general contention that hearing impairment can be remedied by the use of technical aids. However, not even the most sophisticated hearing aid can bring about normal hearing, and in some situations many hard-of-hearing pupils become functionally deaf. In noisy surroundings, or in situations where it is necessary to whisper, the hearing aid is of no use. When hearing-impaired pupils are placed in regular classes arrangements are usually geared to making them use their hearing residuals to the utmost. Also, placement in class is mostly designed to secure contact with the teacher - often at the expense of contacts with classmates. The counselling of teachers should include discussions of how to plan and carry out work in class so that the hearing-impaired pupil does not have to try to hear every

utterance. It must be emphasized that information should always be accessible by other means than hearing.

Many different circumstances influence the social situation of a hard-of-hearing pupil - attitudes, behaviours and personalities of staff and schoolmates, circumstances in the physical environment and, last but not least, characteristics of the hearing-impaired pupils themselves, e. g. functional hearing capacity, additional handicaps, personality and, to a large extent, age. In a person's teens, when the sharing of thoughts and feelings takes up much of the time, an impeded ability to take part in conversations will be of consequence. Peer companionships become particularly important in the passing from childhood into the adult role. In the course of the process of emancipation from their families, young people need friends to confide in, and the sharing of experiences with equals becomes essential.

At this stage, when identity problems come to the fore and the need for contacts outside the family increases, many of the hearing-impaired pupils faced a diminution in social relations. Some found themselves without friends and more or less excluded from companionships.

Young people develop their identity through the relations with others. It is through these relations they become 'someone'. 'Who' they become depends on the nature of interactions and on how they perceive that others look upon them. Friends are of great importance for the acquisition of a positive self-image - looking at oneself as an able, competent person. To the hard of hearing, it can be difficult to establish friendships based on a genuine mutuality with hearing friends.

Today there is a growing realization that hard-of-hearing children and young people need each other and that the use of sign language would often be a great convenience - it facilitates communication, particularly on occasions when the hearing aid is of no use, and it increases opportunities for social contacts.

Even if the fundamental communication problems remain, belonging to a group of equals who share important characteristics may enable the hard of hearing to maintain their confidence in the world of the hearing, too.

A more detailed report is available in Swedish (Tvingstedt, 1993).

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ISSN 1100-3391

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